

Vital Civic Registration System as a Tool for Development Planning in Nigeria: An Examination of the Major Challenges

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Abstract

This study examines the processes and procedures of Vital Civic Registration System in Nigeria. The essence is to highlight those factor militating against effective and efficient Vital Civic Registration System as a veritable means of obtaining current data you update census data; which are required for planning on the one hand, and on the other hand, attempting to proffer possible measures to improve on Vital Civic Registration System in Nigeria. The data for this study were mainly generated from secondary sources. The content analysis method was used. Relying on theory to explain how the general demographic system works, effort are however made to link the secondary data with personal experiences with the stakeholder in the vital registration centres and locales. The paper reveals that the Vital Civic Registration System is hindered by such factors as low level of literacy, inaccessibility centres influence of strong cultural belief, poor appreciation of the need for these data; and type of model adopted in Nigeria. Among other thing, the paper recommends that with urgency a continuous intensive and extensive public enlightenment campaign throughout the country on the issue of vital civic registration

Keywords: Civic registration, System, Development, Planning Enlightenment Campaign, literacy

Introduction

The population data of a country contain all the important in for planning and for the rendering of services, as input factor for decision in the day-to-day administration, formulation of policies, allocation of resources, policy implementation and the monitoring of government programmes. Census data is an in dispensable data base required for the measurement of physical, economic and the social well being of the people in a country. It involves both local and international evaluation of human development. It can therefore be argued that, a country that is devoid of these necessary data support can hardly develop (Menakaya, 2001:18)

This study focuses on the vital civic registration component of population census; with a view to highlighting the inhibiting factor and suggests measures for improving on it. In developed societies, vital statistics constitute an instrument for upgrading census figures on a continuous basis. Such vital registration data enable government and the people to execute an effective and far-reaching national development plans. Since independence, Nigeria had conducted several census exercises that produced figures though accepted for planning, remain contentious. Nigeria has not been able to implement a reliable vital civic registration system. It should be noted that the history of census in Nigeria has never be noted that the history of census in Nigeria has never been devoid of controversy and each successive attempt has often been replete with very sensitive reaction ranging from culture, religious to ethnic reasons (Shangodoyin and Oluwayemisi, 2008:83). In 1988, the National Population Commission (NPC) was inaugurated and charged with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining machinery for continuous and universal registration of births and deaths throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was also mandated to collect, collate and publish data on migration statistics. Consequently, the Commission established registration centres in all the local government areas of the country, and the area council in Abuja the nation's capital. To effectively regulate the vital registration system, the National Population Commission in exercise of the power conferred on it under section 49 of Decree No. 69 of 1992 came up with the "Birth, Death, Marriages Registration, hierarchy and the duties of all official involved in the exercise, information, time limit for the registrations of event, and the fees to paid for late registration.

Vital registration can briefly be defined as the formal recording of vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, divorce, migration and host of other. These events are termed "vital" because they relate to happenings which affect the individual's entry into or departure from life, including changes affecting his civil status during his lifetime. Unlike countries like Sweden, Denmark and Finland, where these events are registered promptly and their population or part of it can be more readily determined, the vast majority of Nigerians even in the recent times have never seen the necessity to register these events (Onokerhoraye, 19 85:17). Data for vital statistics provide information on the seasonal fluctuations in the number of births and deaths and this is important for planning related services for investigating causes of death where applicable. In addition, the sex-structure or birth the number of males per 100 females at birth) is important information used in population projections and this can only readily be obtained from vital registration statistics. Vital statistic is also useful in formulating population control programmes and for evaluating the effectiveness of such programmes. The rate of growth of 3.2% per annum before 1991 and 2006 seems curious because between 1963 and 1991, the average annual rate of growth was put at 2.83%. with increased growth in the economy, increased standard of living, migration of Nigerians particularly the middle class abroad which has been phenomenal since 1991 and with the

crushing hard economic situation since 90's, one would have expected the rate of population growth to fall below 2.83% which it was between the 80's and 1991 (Alaba, 2008:6). These controversial oppositions by population scholars are never some of the possible factors that may be inhibiting vital registration system as a relevant component of demographic analysis and population studies.

Statement of the Problem

The essence of population census in Nigeria and what census is taken to be, remain a problem which successive administrations have tried to solve. Also, the perception of census as the key to economic and political well being has greatly impeded the effort at obtaining a fairly accurate population figures for the county. Since population census is conducted once every ten years, actual population figures for planning can only be obtained by ensuring that all vital events within the country are properly recorded. Inaccurate population figures have resulted in a number of policy failures in the country. An example of a policy which failed because it was not based on actual population figure is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme. According to Musa (200:16) the failure was based on wrong figures projected on week data base, where the number of pupils registered was far in excess of the projected figure

In developed societies, vital statistics constitute an instrument for updating census figures on a continuous basis. Such vital registration data enable government and the people execute an effective and far-reaching national development plan. But since independence, Nigeria has not been able to implement a reliable registration system. However, because of its novelty as a programme of National Population Commission, the task of implementing a very successful vital registration centres in all the local government areas of the country, the response to examine the processes encouraging. Therefore, the study attempts to examine the processes and highlighting some of the factors that constitute impediments to the national vital registration exercise in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives

- To underscore the relevance of vital registration system as a major component and source of data for accurate population census
- To identify some of the factors that constitute impediments to the successful implementation of the vital registration system in Nigeria.
- To suggest strategies for mitigating or eliminating the inhibiting factor for overall desire of achieving an encouraging level of vital registration system.

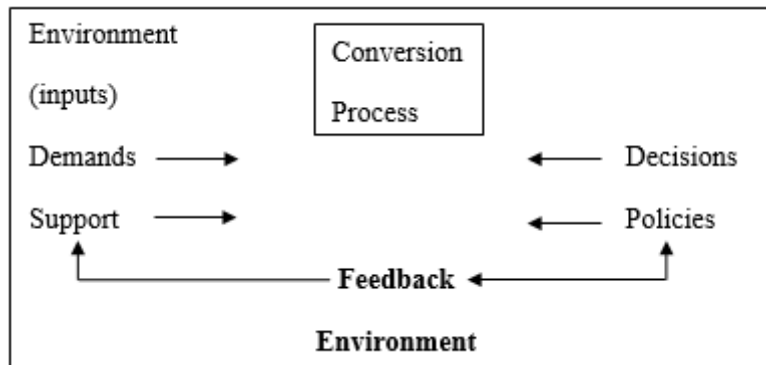
Basic Assumptions

- The following assumption have been formulated for the purpose of this study
- That the level of education influences the peoples' response to the vital registration system.
- That access to vital registration units affect response rate
- That strong cultural beliefs influence response rate to vital registration system

Theoretical Frame Work

The Systems Theory: In this study, the system theory is employed here to explain the relevance of the vital registration system as a major component among the sources of population data; without which the system of continuous updating of census data for planning will be hindered. The system theory is a pioneering model of political analysis. It conceives politics in terms of political system. Any collection of elements that interacting some way with one another can be considered a system (Dahl, 1991, Easton, 1967). The philosophy of the Eastonian Systems Theory therefore, is that a system consists of different part (Sub-systems). These sub-system or part must be healthy and active to ensure the form of relationship that can engender the achievement of the overall goal of system. The failure of one or more of the part impinges negatively on the overall purpose of the system. In David Easton's terminology, the political system receives inputs from the environment in form of demand and supports it produces outputs in form of policies and decisions. The outputs flow back into the environment through a feedback mechanics giving rise to fresh demands. This may be illustrated diagrammatically in fig 1 below.

The Eastonian System Model



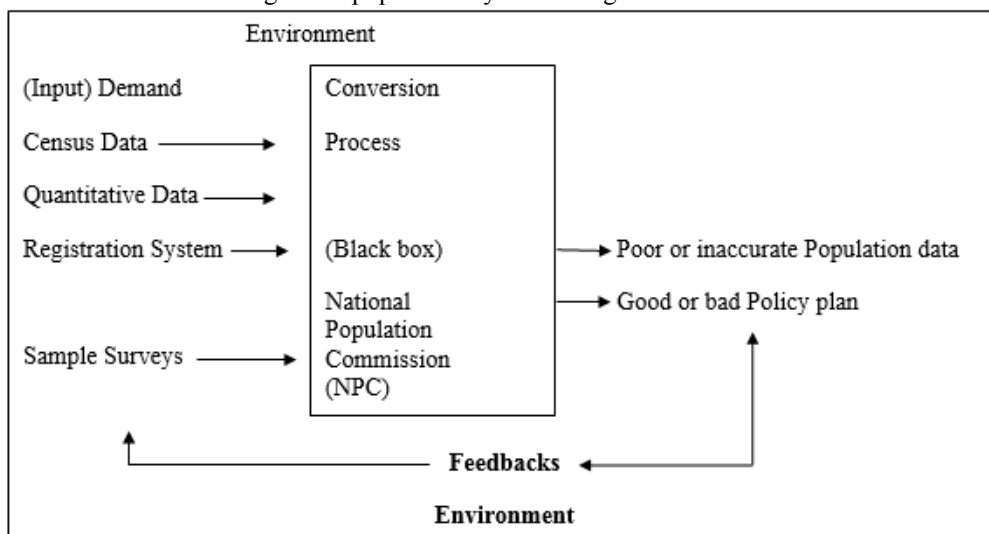
Source: Gauba (2003), Introduction to Political Theory: (Pg 93)

The System Theory And Vital Civic Registration System As A Component Of Population Data System

Osemwota (1990:53) asserts that the system theory is directed toward discovering and exploring the nature of relationships among component parts of the system as well as factor and influences, external or internal which impinges on the component, parts and the system as a whole. The system therefore must consist of different part of which may include the inputs, conversion process, out puts, feedbacks and the environment. These components, thus, in providing good policies for the society, there must be inputs without which the conversion process will have nothing to process into output that will generate feedback from the environment. This explains the importance of the different component or part of the systems. It is from this system relationship that this study draws analogy to explain the phenomenon of population dynamics.

In contemporary population data analysis, acceptable population data for planning has been explained in form of a product of a system. In other words, a reliable population data is a product of different sources which Onokerhoraye (1995:16) calls components of population system; among which registration system is key. In population data gathering system, the inputs components include the census data, registration system, sample surveys and others, the conversion process here means the population data generation process while the output means the extensive and accurate population statistics required for planning. All these systems relationship also happen in the environment from which feedbacks come back in form of good or filed education and health planning for the society.

The analysis of the population data system above shows that, the study of population, require extensive and accurate data because, the validity of the result of the analysis of population in any locality depends on the coverage and reliability of data used, thus, accurate population data must emanate from the effective management of all components of sources of population data, without which population data will be inadequate and incorrect that will always result in policy failures. Therefore, a well developed vital registration system is a Sine-nen-quanon in the effort at ensuring accurate population data on which economic, political and other policies are based. See the working of the population system in Fig. below:



Population Data

The dearth of demographic data in Nigeria has been a source of concern to government, scholars and policy

analysts. Efforts at obtaining accurate population figures on which to base development plans have not yielded much results. Population census which has been the major source of data on population has been plagued by over-politicization. Hence, Okunsanya (1999:5) observes that “head counts” in Nigeria have been greatly flawed with corruption by power thirsty ones who maintain great duplication of published figures in order to acquire seats in legislatures. This has necessitated the exploration of complimentary sources of population data. Another reason for the manipulation or falsification of census figures in Nigeria is that population is one of the criteria or principle for the allocation of federal collected revenue among the states and local government of the federation. Traditionally, the statistics for demographic analysis and population studies are derived from vital registration system. Periodic census or enumeration, sample surveys or inquiries and non-conventional sources of population data (Kpedekpe 1979; Lucas 1994; Onokerhoraye 1995; Umoh 2001). These various sources have been explored by different countries, but in Nigeria, attention has been focused more on the conduct of censuses.

Adekunle (1998:1) states that census exercise is a decennial affair, very costly and Nigeria experience has been faced with the problem of inflated figures over the years. This cankerworm has eaten deep had to be culture of census to the extent that other sources of generating reliable current demographic data had to be explored. Woods (1982:8) maintained that we have within the broad spectrum of demographic sources, two very distinctive sets of data, each of which is derived in a specific manner. Firstly, much elementary demographic information comes from population counts or more recently census. Secondly, vital statistics are provided by system of continuous registration. On his Part, Onokerhoraye (1985:17) states that the census method of collecting population data described the states of population in particular area at a given in time. Consequently, population census is less useful for analyzing population dynamics. To him “vital registration” which is not only continuous, but also backed by law should used to complement population census as registration data relates for various analytical purpose.

Grebenik (1968:340) defines vital statistics as statistics on principal event in the life of an individual. He opines that these events are usually gathered at the time of event such as birth, marriage, the dissolution of marriage and death. He contends that vital registration in developing countries should be made compulsory so that it will be complete and in Nigeria has not been amenable to legal compulsory. In some part of Nigeria, disclosure of the number of children one has is seen as a culture taboo and because of the people’s belief in reincarnation (life after death), reporting the death of someone to stranger may be perceived to be counter-productive, that is, the smooth process of reincarnation may be interrupted or completely thwarted Idahosa and Otoghile (1999:228). In order to disabuse the minds of the people regarding these tendencies, they need to be persuaded and not compelled without first giving intensive re-orientation. Trough a systematic process of enlightenment, the people should be made to understand that if birth and deaths, for example, are registered there will be no visitation of adverse consequences on them the foregoing analysis is in tandem with the argument by Lucas (1994:7) that if registration is effective and compulsory, as it in Australia, Demark, Britain and America, the number of birth and deaths used together with most recent census and migration statistics will facilitate the calculation of births and deaths rates and up-to-date estimates of population. To Lucas, prevention of diseases and reduction of mortality can be achieved through the analysis of date in respect of a registered cause of a person’s death, his age and occupation. From the point of view of administration Lucas (1994:7) conclusion that the difficulties and cost of effective and reliable registration system are so enormous that registration is likely to provide demographic data for more developing countries within the next decades seems very expedient. In most cases, the economies of these countries, particularly Nigeria have been mismanaged by the leaders with the result that their ability to embark on masses-oriented policies and programmes are hamstrung by debilitating degree of corruption.

As mentioned earlier, migration is one of the aspects of vital registration system. Migration is defined by Ogunlade (1995:4) as the movement of people across a specific boundary for the purpose of establishing a new permanent residence. There is international migration (migration between countries) as well internal migration (migration within a country). Ogunlade (1886:7) states that with specific reference to contemporary civic registration system in Nigeria, there seems to be greater emphasis on the registration of births and deaths with less attention on migration. Under migration, it is just the international category that is given some attention. The issue of the registration of internal migration is yet to come into the mainstream in the civic registration system. Scholar have advanced various reasons for this. For example Emereuwanu (1995:1) and Oluwayemisi (2008:16) have observed generally that the greatest interest in vital statistics in Nigeria is directed to data on births and deaths because, these two event are needed for development planning, evaluation of public facilities, life insurance, medical services research and population analysis; for the comparison of trends and changes in fertility and mortality and morbidity rates in the society on a continuous basis.

In order to have effective vital registration system Linder (1981:4) suggests that for developing countries, start must be made with capital cities; (Urban Centres)... After the registration system in the urban centres is deemed operational, effort must be then transferred to semi-urban and rural areas. This is because; Linder in work above suggested that the rural people are highly illiterate and lack sufficient education on the

usefulness of vital registration. He concluded by also recommending that these creation of local centres will ensure easy access to registration centres by the people in rural areas. In Nigeria, the national vital registration policy is being implemented throughout the county. But the coverage and intensity is very low. Therefore, the work is to identify some of the socio-economic factor militating against the effective implementation of the policy with a view to proffering solution to them and ultimately achieving enhancing vital civic registration system.

Model of Vital Registration and Their Inhibiting Factor

Scholar have shown that it is a worldwide phenomenon that as different model are used to collect vital registration data, they expose some inhibiting factors which if not eliminated hinder effective vital registration system. According to Emereuwana (1995:4) essentially there are two major methods or model of collecting vital data namely The Passive Model and The Active Model

The Passive Model

In this model, relevant official of the authorized agency National Population Commission (NPC) stay in their offices and expect people to come and register any vital events that occur with them. this method is used in more developed countries like Australia, Canada, Denmark and some less developed ones including Nigeria. Its main advantage is that it is less expensive than the Active Model because it does not require the provision of elaborate infrastructures and logistics. The appointment of officials to man the designated centres will suffice. However, the Passive Model has not been very successful in some countries, particularly, in Nigeria. This method has failed woefully for some reasons. Emereuwana (2007:12) argues that;

Low literacy level of citizen, inability to appreciate the need for these data, insufficient education of the masses on the usefulness of these vital data and how they will affect them either as individual or as a group, in accessible centres particularly in the rural areas; and in-adequate incentives for the to patronized these centres.

It is against the foregoing background that Ascadi and Igun (1992:8) contend, that if African nations, particularly, Nigeria insist on adopting inarticulate registration system and do not develop their own more appropriate system suitable for their culture, decades will pass before the establishment of complete vital statistics. However, we believe that the above view-point does not foreclose the possibility, desirability and feasibility of adaptation of alien model to suit local circumstances in Nigeria.

The Active Model

Shagodoyin (2008:84) argues that the model requires that registration staff go out to canvas for recruitment of large number of registration clerks who should be trained and provided with the means of transportation and other incentives so that they can effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. The staff pays periodic visit families and household together information on vital events. This method is extensive because it requires it a complex administrative arrangement for effective management. The adoption of the model in Nigeria would necessitate the division of country into several constituencies, enumeration areas and wards by the National Population Commission (NPC) which is the coordinating agency. The ward leader should coordinate at the ward level because, he is place in position to be acquainted with the occurrence of vital events in the locality (Emereuwana 1995; Grebenik:1968; Umoh 2001). He will be at this level should be collected and sent to Local Government Office of the National Population Commission, which will process them for onward transmission, to their headquarter for final analysis.

In addition to the arrangement indicated above, all maternities, hospitals and health clinics should be constituted into local registration centres. They should be required by law to finish the commission with information on vital events that take place on regular basis. To ensure the success of this model, there is need to create adequate awareness among the people on the importance of vital registration (Umoh 2001). For greater effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the vital registration system in Nigeria, we negative factors identified is this study. Whiles some officers go to the field to record vital events, others should remain in their offices to attend to voluntary information. In this way, different publics and individual in the society will be fully brought into awareness of the relevance of the importance of vital statistics and they start events on their own or voluntarily, that active model may be discontinued. For now, the positive aspects of both models should be accepted.

The National Population Commission (NPC) as published in Federal Republic of Nigeria's official Gazette (2007:2) show that the 2006 census figures stood at 14,003,542 with a total average growth rate of 3.2%. this statistics is a result of the analysis of information elicited during census. Between 1991 and 2000 when the last census was conducted, an effective and efficient vital registration system would have provided current vital data for planning and population projection in any part of the country. If Nigeria fails to develop working vital registration system, but rely on only census data comes after 10 to 15 years, we will continue to rely on almost

outdated statistics for planning and development. The development of our vital registration system has become expedient especially because of the controversies generated by most recent census figures arising from the argument that political leader manipulate and influence census official to inflate figures in their areas relying only on “de jure” instead of defacto methods (Menakaya 2001:36)

Conclusion

The study was conducted to examine the effects of some socio-economic factors on the people’s response to the vital civic registration system as a critical component of the Nigeria population system. The vital civic registration system, in Nigeria has not being effective and efficient. The purpose therefore, was to appropriate recommendations. The literature was review to examine the effects of level of education, accessibility to registration centres, and the effects of cultural beliefs.

One of the major findings of the study is that there is a poor publicity of conscientization. Another problem identified has to do with inadequate number of vital registration centres. A situation where a local government area has only one registration centres does not allow for adequate coverage of vital events. In view of the registration centres as close as possible. Furthermore, it has been shown that the less time people spend in getting to the registration centres, the higher the tendency for them to register vital events. This study, also show that there is a possible relationship between educational attainment and the reporting of vital events.

The need for public awareness campaign is further reinforced by the findings in respect of the relationship between cultural beliefs and reporting of vital events. It has been shown that persons who are less attached to cultural belief with regard to registration of births and deaths respond more to the registration of vital events. By carrying out public enlightenment campaigns enough awareness would be created thereby correcting the negative belief where they exist. The objective of the vital registration system may not at all be achieved if deliberate effort are not made to are not made to sensitize the citizens on the benefits derivable effort are not made to sensitize the citizens on factors militating against a successful registration system.

Recommendations

It is expedient and incumbent on this paper to make the following specific recommendations:

The National Population Commission (NPC) should as a matter of urgency embark on a continuous intensive and extensive in public enlightenment campaign throughout the country. The National Orientation agency (NOA) may be of a veritable instrument for this orientation campaign. The Commission should employ more staff and create more registration centres so as to make them more easily accessible to the people. Our visit to most Local Government Councils Offices indicates that NPC staffs are hardly seen in their offices after census periods. This had always discouraged people who had transaction with them emphasis should be placed on the presentation of birth certificates and not declaration of age from court as a precondition for admission in an educational institution, whether public or private. Consequently, efforts should be made by government to phase out the use of age declaration as a substitute for birth certificates. This will prompt citizens to citizens to register their births. Functional overlaps between the National Population Commission (NPC) and the Local Government Council in matter concerning the registration of vital events should be removed. The Commission should coordinate all matters that have to do with vital registration. Issuance of burial permits should depend on the registration of the death with the appropriate authority. Defaulters should be severely sanctioned to encourage death registration. The National Population Commission should ensure that relevant materials for the registration of vital events are made available in sufficient quantities at any point in time. The rationale for this is that, if there is continuous shortage of materials, prospective informant are likely to be discouraged from registering vital events.

It is therefore hoped that the implementation of the above recommendations will contribute immensely to the effective and efficient execution of the vital civic registration system in Nigeria. If successfully implemented and sustained, its complementary role the census exercise and by extension the country’s demographic data system will be greatly enhanced; and accurate will be available for policy planners. This will ensure that policy failures as a result of unreliable data will be a thing of the past.

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